



Playing Video Cello

Wearing TV glasses with tiny TV sets, Charlotte Moorman plucks abstract sounds from a cello composed of three TV sets set to a video-tape player. She and her partner, Nam June Paik, who composes music for her and has an exhibit of his Video Synthesizer, are at the Everson Museum through Sunday.

She's Wired For Sound

By NEVART APIKIAN
Playing the "one and only Video Cello in the whole world," Charlotte Moorman is literally wired for sound.

on Syracuse stations while the Video Cello sets were on Channel 3 or playing video tapes of John Cage or Janis Joplin.

The internationally known cellist, together with her partner, Nam June Paik, on the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, are performing this week through Sunday at the Everson Museum.

Miss Moorman flew in yesterday from Mexico City where she had been concertizing with her own cello, plus the unique "TV Bra for Living Sculpture" — Paik's newest work.

Explaining the Video Cello while plucking the instrument's two strings in abstract sounds over a video tape of the late Janis Joplin (on the TV sets), she said that in music you "either improve on existing sounds or create something new."

"When Brahms' Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra was first played, it was thought far-out," she said. "I would have loved to have been that cellist."

Her Video Cello, only about three months old, was constructed by Paik and Ralph Hocking, who teaches at the State University of New York at Binghamton, and runs an Experimental TV Center there. Hocking came to Syracuse to set up the Video Cello and nine TV sets in the upstairs gallery at the Everson where patrons are enjoying the colorful experience of the Video Synthesizer.

The Video Cello consists of three TV sets of varying sizes — what appears to be a 12-inch set on top; a nine-inch on the vertical in the center and a larger 16-inch for the bottom — all enclosed in plexiglass in the shape of a cello — with two strings, the A and C.

In addition, Miss Moorman wears "TV glasses" with two 1½-inch TV sets on either side (the smallest TV sets in the world). Series of wires lead into her and the workings of the set are strapped to her back.

"I could be electrocuted, there are so many wires," she said, not at all jokingly.

The tiny sets were turned in

The Video Cello was premiered at a New York festival, after which Miss Moorman played it from Nov. 21 to Dec. 17 at the Gallery Bonino in New York City.

"Nam June Paik and I became partners in 1964," she said, "and he's written numerous works for me. One is the 'Swan' in which I jump in the water and come up damp and dripping to finish the work.

"Then there's 'Opera Sextronique' with partial nudity. We didn't know it was against the law. It became a test case. Now — considering what's being shown in New York City — it's legal. I play the cello in various masks. The work is supposed to show the beauty of womanhood."

Miss Moorman has also played "Cut Piece" by Yoko Ono, in which the audience is invited to cut her gown. "When I wear the TV Bra, I look down on the two sets while playing the cello (her "real" cello is a Lockey Hill made in 1795 and is a copy of a Stradivarius). When the set is tuned in on baseball, soap operas or commercials, I know what sounds to create to make the video do some interesting things.

Both artists have traditional backgrounds in music. Paik is a graduate of the University of Toyko and studied musicology at the University of Munich. He did experimental work in electronic music in Cologne, Germany, and has taught at the California Institute of Arts and also in nearby Binghamton, where he works with Hocking at the Experimental TV Center.

Miss Moorman began playing the cello at the age of 10 and then played with the Arkansas Symphony, because they needed cellists. She received a master of music degree from the University of Texas and did special studies at Juilliard. For three years she played with the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski.